

MAJOR'S HALL
BLOOMINGTON ILLINOIS
McLEAN Co.

HABS NO. ILL. 239

HABS
ILL,

57-Bloom,

1-

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA.
DISTRICT NO. ILL.-2

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
• EDGAR E. LUNDEEN - DISTRICT OFFICER •
CORN BELT BANK BUILDING - BLOOMINGTON ILL.

HABS
ILL,

57-Bloom,

1-

MAJOR'S HALL
Bloomington, McLean County, Illinois

Owner. Mr. John B. Gummerman
609 E. Front Street
Bloomington, Illinois

Date of Erection. 1851.

Architect. Unknown.

Builder. Unknown.

Present Condition. The building now stands only two stories, the top or Hall proper having burned off. It is fairly well preserved. Many repairs have been made, but no real changes except the store fronts, which have been changed about three times. The east wall has bulged about six inches out of line.

Number of Stories. Two, and basement under east half only.

Materials of Construction. The foundations and all exterior walls are solid brick masonry, furred on the inside. The center brick wall extends to the second floor ceiling. Original interior partitions are plaster on wood studs, while later partitions are wall board. Floors are pine on oak joists. Many of the charred timbers remain that supported the third floor.

Other Existing Records. A lithograph drawing of Bloomington made about 1856, drawn by H. G. Haerting on stone and

published by L. Gast & Bros., St. Louis, shows many business buildings. One is the property of the McLean County Historical Society and one is owned by David Davis of Bloomington. The building is also rather vaguely shown in early photographs in "Picturesque Bloomington", property of the McLean County Historical Society. Early photograph of stairway owned by Mr. Fred Schuler, Bloomington, Illinois.

Additional Data. The following more important notices culled from early issues of the press serve as authentic information relative to the uses of Major's Hall:

Bloomington Intelligencer
May 4, 1853

"The Newhall Family will give a concert at Major's new Hall on Thursday, May 5, 1853."

They gave two concerts, and then on Friday, May 13, 1853, gave a concert at Major's Hall for the prospective Central Female Institute.

Bloomington Intelligencer
July 13, 1853

"Alexander, the Magician, performs this evening at Major's Hall."

"Mr. Slason's concert will come off at Major's Hall on Wednesday evening, next August 10, 1853. Mr. Slason has labored faithfully in giving the young folks gratuitous lessons, and is incurring considerable expense in preparing for the occasion. Mr. Slason is going to spend the forenoons of this week trimming the Hall. We would suggest the young people turn out and assist him."

"How Lincoln Became President"
By Cyrenius Wakefield

Pub. by Wilson-Erickson Inc., New York

On September 9, 1854, a meeting favorable to the organization of a Republic Party was held in Major's Hall whose platform was Anti-Nebraska and Anti-Liquor traffic. Delegates were elected to the convention held here September 12, and 13th. Nothing developed from that convention. Among those

in attendance were A. Lincoln, John M. Palmer, Gov. of Illinois, O. M. Browning, Secretary of the Interior, Richard Yates, Governor; Richard J. Oglesby, Leonard Swett.

Major's Hall called Major's Block
Bloomington City Directory 1855-56
by J. R. Freese, M.D., Pub. 1855

"This fine brick block was erected in 1851, by William T. Major, on the corner of Front and East streets. It has a front of about 50 feet extending back from Front street about 60 feet. The first floor is occupied by a dry goods store and a grocery store. Mr. R. O. Warriner operated the Dry Goods and T. C. Humphreys the grocery.

The second floor is occupied by a music teacher, portrait painter, select school, &c. The third story is Major's Hall, occupying the whole area of the building."

Diary of Isaac L. Kenyon

May 15, 1855

"Bloomington 1853 to 56" by Mary P. Hoover
in

"Transactions of McLean County Historical
Society", Vol. II, p. 424.

"The first mention of the Young Men's Christian Association is April 3, 1855, when they elected officers; and in June, the same year, Rev. Alfred Eddy spoke before the Y.M.C.A. in Major's Hall."

Weekly Pantagraph

December 26, 1855

"John B. Gough, the famous Temperance Lecturer spoke at Major's Hall December 25, 1855. His eulogy on the "glass of water" was exceedingly beautiful, surpassing anything of the kind we have ever heard in the State."

Weekly Pantagraph

March 19, 1856

"The Alleghenians will give a concert at Major's Hall on Thursday, March 27, 1856."

Weekly Pantagraph

August 27, 1856

"Ole Bull, the great Fiddle King, assisted by Adelina Patti, vocalist, Roth pianist, and Schreiber cornet,

gave a concert at Major's Hall August 19, 1856."

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Weekly Pantagraph
September 17, 1856

"Lincoln spoke several times in Major's Hall. His "Lost Speech" on May 29, 1856, and his speech of September 17, being most important. His speech of May 29, so thoroughly engrossed the listeners that reporters failed to take notes, and thereby lost all record of his remarks."

Weekly Pantagraph
October 7, 1857

"The first session of the Illinois State Normal University commenced in Major's Hall Monday morning (October 5). 29 scholars were in attendance."

Major's Hall housed the Normal University classes from the fall of '57, to 1860, when the first building was completed on the present Normal Campus. This building is still in good condition (1936) and being used regularly.

"Semi-Centennial History of the
Illinois State Normal University,
1857-1907"

by David Felmley

Article written by Henry McCormick,
1868.

"Principal Hovey, assisted by Ira Moore, opened the school in Major's Hall, in Bloomington, October 5, 1857. There were twenty-nine pupils present the first day, and the number increased to 127 during the academic year. The prospects of the school were very favorable and all looked forward with pleasant anticipations to the time, presumably near at hand, when the school should be housed in the palatial building being erected on the prairie near the 'Junction'."

The third story of Major's Hall caught fire November 18, 1872. The water shortage, which was pumped from cisterns, prevented early control of the flames, allowing the entire top portion to be destroyed.

Weekly Pantagraph
January 17, 1873

"The work of reconstruction of the Major's Hall building

is going on with energy. The walls have been cut down to two stories, in which form the building will be repaired, and we understand, finished in much better style than before the fire."

Weekly Pantagraph
September 26, 1890

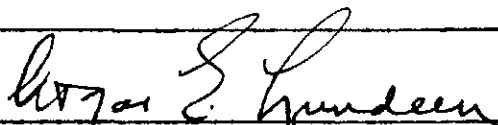
"The Republican party was baptized in this city. In 1856, there was a convention here in Major's Block of the remnants of the old Whig party and a certain school of democrats who differed with their leaders on what was then known as the Nebraska bill. These men met to formulate the creed of what became the Republican party. These men afterward became a part of the history of the country. Here in this quiet shaded town, far removed from the bustle and contamination of ward politics, the great national party was brought into existence. The most remarkable speech of the convention was made by Abraham Lincoln. The secretary of that convention was Jesse W. Fell."

A bronze tablet was placed on the building bearing the following inscription:

This Tablet Marks
The Site Where
Abraham Lincoln
Delivered His Famous
"Lost Speech"
May 29, 1856

placed by
Letitia Green Stevenson Chapter
Daughters of the American
Revolution May 29, 1918

(Approved)


District Officer

See Sept 25.36 TWC.